

Directorate of
Intelligence



Office of
Soviet Analysis

Where is the USSR Headed?

Gorbachev has unleashed an earthquake in the Soviet system that has already gone far toward destroying the old ideological institutions he inherited from Brezhnev and Stalin.

- o His policy of democratization has critically weakened the party at all levels while strengthening the authority of independent institutions.
- o Glasnost has permitted exposes of the crimes of the Stalin and Brezhnev eras and discredited old methods of totalitarian rule. [REDACTED]

Gorbachev seems to have initiated this shakeup of the system in order to prepare the groundwork for a new, less centralized, more humane society. We see little evidence there is a blueprint, however, and evidence suggests that his tactics result from ad hoc challenges and opportunities. Thus far his reforms have produced more turmoil than tangible accomplishments.

- o The upsurge of nationalism unleashed by Gorbachev now poses fundamental challenges to the leadership. In the Baltic republics, there is a growing constitutional challenge to the legitimacy and integrity of the USSR.
- o Deteriorating economic conditions spawned partially by the reforms have produced widespread consumer dissatisfaction and growing labor unrest. Earlier this summer, several hundred thousand coal miners conducted a successful strike. [REDACTED]

Current turmoil--and accompanying leadership tensions--make it difficult to predict just where the Soviet Union is headed but some significant revisions to the current course seem increasingly likely.

- o Reformers appear to be seeking to exploit popular impatience with the pace of change to accelerate their radical agenda and move more vigorously toward a more pluralistic political system and market-oriented economy.
- o Moderate and traditionalists members of the leadership will continue to try to restrict reform by insisting on greater party control of the economy.
- o In any event, the leadership seems to realize that it must move to calm unrest. The appointment of KGB Chairman Kryuchkov to the Politburo underlined Gorbachev's policy to crack down on crime and societal disorder. It may also presage a tougher policy toward nationalists in the non-Russian republics. [REDACTED]

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SOVIET PROBLEMS WITH NARCOTICS

Although drug abuse in the USSR is still negligible by Western standards, it appears to be growing rapidly:

- o According to TASS, Soviet specialists believe the actual number of users is several times the official figure of 124,000.
- o A deteriorating economy and increasingly alienated youth are among the many factors spurring on increased drug use.
- o The growth in the number and sophistication of organized criminal organizations and in unregulated private activity has created new openings for drug dealers.
- o While some marijuana and opium is cultivated in Soviet Central Asia, it appears that the majority of drugs used by Soviet citizens are brought in from outside the country, especially hashish and heroin from Southwest Asia. [REDACTED]

Soviet officials have tried a number of measures to stem the growing Soviet drug problem:

- o In 1987, a dealer organization operating nationwide was smashed.
- o Over the past three years, Soviet customs officials have confiscated tons of Afghan hashish being trans-shipped through Moscow to Western European and North American markets.
- o Attempts to eradicate the cultivation of marijuana and opium in Soviet Central Asia have been stepped up.
- o The Soviet media have been increasingly used in an attempt to educate the public on the drug problem, emphasizing criminal penalties for dealers and encouraging voluntary rehabilitation--with no criminal penalties--of users. [REDACTED]

Such measures, however, have had only a limited effect:

- o KGB Chairman Kryuchkov and other officials have argued that existing counternarcotics measures are inadequate, claiming that more drugs are entering the USSR.
- o Soviet security forces are still short of personnel, training, and equipment to initiate effective drug controls.
- o Rehabilitation efforts are hampered by the shortage of hospital space, equipment, and trained personnel. [REDACTED]

SOVIET ENVIRONMENTAL PROBLEMS

Among its many byproducts, glasnost has revealed the monumental environmental problems facing the Soviet Union. Examples:

- o Half of all Soviet municipal water supplies have pollution levels 10 times Soviet state standards.
- o No large Soviet industrial city meets World Health Organization standards for maximum permissible concentration of pollutants in the atmosphere. [REDACTED]

The Soviets have planned a number of steps to reduce environmental hazards:

- o The draft State Ecological Program is designed to end discharges of untreated effluents into the water by the year 2000 and to halve discharges of pollutants into the atmosphere by the year 2005. This program is expected to cost upwards of 400 billion rubles.
- o Safety improvements have been scheduled for most older Soviet nuclear power plants, although they will still be unsafe by US standards. [REDACTED]

A number of factors, however, complicate Moscow's efforts to enhance environmental protection. These include:

- o The cost of environmental safeguards at a time when the country is trying to restructure its economy is almost prohibitive.
- o Government organs responsible for protection of the environment lack the clout necessary to force polluting industries to adhere to stricter codes.
- o Environmental protection technology and equipment is lacking. [REDACTED]

In light of the Moscow's inability or unwillingness to act, local citizens' groups have applied increasing pressure on local government officials:

- o Polluting factories in numerous cities were forced to adhere to stricter pollution codes after citizens petitioned local leaders for help.
- o Public pressure forced the closure of the Armenian nuclear power station and the postponement in the construction or expansion of at least 12 others. *
- o Activists in the Baltic republics have made protection of the environment a key platform in their call for greater autonomy from Moscow.
- o In March 1989 elections to the Congress of Peoples Deputies, a number of candidates were elected on the strength of an environmental program. Future elections--national, regional, and local--will probably see an increasing number of candidates with an environmental agenda. [REDACTED]

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ORGANIZED CRIME

Organized crime had existed in the USSR for decades before the Gorbachev era. Mafia-type networks first surfaced under Khrushchey. Crime has expanded considerably, however, in the last few years. Although its full scope cannot be measured precisely, an Interior Ministry official has claimed that 350 million rubles' worth of valuables and cash were confiscated from criminal bosses between 1986 and 1988. Much of this results from the growing cooperative (private) business sector.

- o Gangs view cooperatives as tempting targets because many of them generate large amounts of cash and because local authorities, already ambivalent about the cooperative movement or sometimes in cahoots with local crime bosses, have been reluctant to step in.
- o Difficulties in getting supplies and raw materials often drive coops to illegal suppliers--making them vulnerable to threats and violence. Many have been forced out of business for refusing to pay protection money.
- o Local "mafias" also are infiltrating legitimate cooperatives. Criminal bosses reportedly lend coops money, charging high rates of interest, and demand seats on their ruling boards and shares of the profits. Many of these coops are used to launder money from the gangs' illegal activities. [REDACTED]

A Soviet investigator has said that the mafia is strongest in the Ukraine and Moldavia, and that it has penetrated into Moscow, Leningrad, and central Russian cities like Tambov, Penza, and Perm. Corruption also has been particularly strong in Central Asia--as evidenced by the scandals in Uzbekistan where fraudulent cotton yields have produced millions of rubles of profits. [REDACTED]

The Soviet underworld is reportedly establishing wider international links, especially in drug trafficking and dealing in antiques and icons. This probably helps explain Moscow's growing interest in joining Interpol. [REDACTED]

To deal with the problem, the regime so far has emphasized increased law enforcement and hinted at stricter laws.

- o Although the KGB is being used to beef up the militia (regular police force), attempts to set up special law enforcements units to fight organized crime have been patchwork and poorly coordinated. / !
- o The militia claims that it is outgunned by weapons in private hands procured on the black market, and militiamen complain about rules requiring them to give warning shots while pursuing criminals. [REDACTED]

Another major obstacle has been the militia's susceptibility to corruption. The Procurator's Office has estimated that two-thirds of the underworld's loot goes to bribe officials, and a recent Soviet article claims that mafias are able to offer bribes ranging from 300,000 to 1 million rubles. [REDACTED]

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HUMAN RIGHTS/LEGAL REFORM

Under Gorbachev human rights performance has made significant--by Soviet standards, remarkable--progress. Among Moscow's achievements:

- o The publication of increasingly daring articles that address fundamental criticisms of the Soviet system and a burgeoning unofficial press.
- o A tremendous growth in unofficial groups and demonstrations.
- o The release of over 650 political prisoners since the beginning of 1987.
- o Efforts to reduce political abuse in the psychiatric system.
- o The highest emigration levels in a decade.
- o A more tolerant attitude toward religious believers--including an end to the administrative prohibition on charitable work by religious organizations and cultural concessions toward Jews and Muslims.

At the same time, the leadership has made clear that it intends to retain its authority to judge the proper limits for individual action, and some local officials have resorted to repression.

- o Authorities in Moscow and other cities have raided the premises of human rights activists, unauthorized publishers, and unofficial groups.
- o The regime has responded arbitrarily to attempts by informal groups to register and meet. Members of groups that challenge the party's predominant role are frequently harassed by the police and attacked in the media.
- o Unauthorized demonstrators are sometimes sentenced to between 5 and 15 days of administrative detention (i.e., without bail).
- o Improper commitments to psychiatric hospitals--often at the behest of corrupt local party officials--still occur.
- o Despite rumors that a change is impending, the Ukrainian Catholic Church--banned since 1946--remains illegal, and the regime's relaxation toward the practice of Islam has been limited.

Progress toward institutionalizing greater human rights can be measured by the passage--and content--of a number of laws that the Supreme Soviet is scheduled to address at its present session. These include laws on the press and on glasnost and various criminal provisions broadening the rights of religious believers and accused criminals. Other positive benchmarks would be the creation of mechanisms to review the constitutionality of laws and to oversee the legality of actions by KGB, police, and other government officials.

Continued progress depends on the political viability of Gorbachev and his allies and the reform program generally. If Gorbachev judges that destabilizing aspects of the reforms have become too threatening, he himself may decide to reimpose greater restraints on human rights.

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EMIGRATION

The Soviets have permitted record numbers of Jews, ethnic Germans and Armenians to emigrate from the USSR, with the total for the three groups climbing from around 1,900 in 1986 to 25,800 in 1987 to 77,800 last year. If present trends continue, the 1989 total could be over 130,000. [REDACTED]

Despite the regime's concessions to Jews (e.g., the opening of cultural centers and permitting the instruction of Hebrew), a fear of rising popular anti-Semitism seems to be sparking a large number of Jewish applicants. Many Soviets want to leave to improve their economic lot and are applying now rather than risk a reversal of emigration policy in the future. [REDACTED]

Since December 1988, almost 200 long-time refuseniks whose cases were supported by the Department of State were released prior to major US-Soviet meetings. There are still an estimated 300-450 refuseniks, primarily those whom the Soviets claim previously had access to state secrets. [REDACTED]

Moscow seems on the verge of passing a new law that would clear up many administrative hindrances to free emigration. The leadership was ready to issue the law last May, but decided to submit it to the Supreme Soviet. If enacted, the law will ease several emigration restrictions:

- o Invitations from abroad will be allowed from a friend, relative or enterprise, and will no longer have to come only from a first-degree relative. One report claims that applicants may not even need an invitation, but will be able to leave upon showing Soviet authorities their entry permit from a foreign country.
- o The emigration ban for those engaged in classified work will expire five years after the applicant's access to the secret information ends.
- o At present, refuseniks called "poor relatives" cannot emigrate if there are objections from family members, either on financial or other grounds. This prohibition will no longer apply to adults whose parents or spouses do not have any financial claims, and applicants will have access to judicial relief to resolve disputes based on financial obligations. [REDACTED]

Despite great increases in the overall number of exit permits, the process by which individuals receive permission still operates capriciously. Many refuseniks are unaware of the appeals process (the Supreme Soviet Citizenship Commission) and cannot get concrete information on their status. [REDACTED]

A recent law allowing citizens to file a court complaint against unlawful actions by officials allows suits only against individual officials and not "collegial organs." This exemption has prevented unsuccessful applicants from suing the emigration office for denying them exit visas. [REDACTED]

The Soviets have made occasional attacks in their media on some Western immigration practices that have been sparked by the much larger flow of Soviet emigres. Moscow has criticized Washington for being too tough in letting Soviet citizens enter but too generous in granting "refugee" status to them. [REDACTED]

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Status of the Soviet Leadership

The leadership balance of power was shifted dramatically in Gorbachev's favor at the 19-20 September Central Committee plenum, where he was able to dismiss three full and two candidate Politburo members who were not enthusiastic supporters of his radical reform program. The changes sharply reduce the threat from traditionalist opponents and bolster his ability to move forward with political and legal reforms.

- o The sacking of party legal and security Secretary Chebrikov, the Politburo's most outspoken critic of perestroika and democratization, was Gorbachev's strongest blow to the party's orthodox wing. (S NF)

The promotion of KGB chairman Vladimir Kryuchkov to Politburo full membership--he skipped candidate membership--may lend increased clout to the regime's expressed desire to ensure law and order.

- o A career intelligence officer, he appears to be a willing ally of Gorbachev's, if not a fervent supporter of radical reform. He has publicly supported legislative oversight of the KGB and has personally led the campaign to improve the security agency's tarnished reputation. [REDACTED]

The promotions also strengthened the authority of the Supreme Soviet, which Gorbachev chairs as President.

- o Promoting Yevgeniy Primakov, chairman of the Council of the Union and a supporter of radical reform, to Politburo candidate membership raises the number of Supreme Soviet officials in the Politburo to three.
- o Vice President Anatoliy Lukyanov, a strong supporter of perestroika who has been acquainted with Gorbachev since they were in law school in the 1950s, already is a Politburo candidate member. He has proven a capable stand-in for Gorbachev in the Supreme Soviet, chairing sessions when the President is otherwise occupied. [REDACTED]

★ Gorbachev still does not have a free hand in the Politburo, and his troubles are far from over.

- o The personnel changes advanced leading moderates in the leadership while passing over reformers seemingly well-placed for promotions, suggesting that Gorbachev's victory was a result of a compromise.
- o While Gorbachev has further consolidated his position in the leadership, he must still find a way to remedy seemingly intractable social and economic problems--namely, an intensifying nationalities crisis, a rising crime rate, critical shortages, inflation, and labor unrest.
- o To solve these problems, Gorbachev must perform a delicate balancing act. If he adopts a more moderate line on some issues, he risks losing his more radical supporters. On the other hand, pressing a faster pace of reform would likely exacerbate leadership tensions and fuel societal tensions. [REDACTED]